

FCC & Pre-K Policy Guides

Issue 4: Curriculum and Family Child Care: Guidance for Mixed-Delivery Pre-K Programs

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Summary

This *Data Snapshot* describes curriculum usage in family child care (FCC) homes that participate in publicly-funded pre-K. Curriculum usage is variable across publicly-funded pre-K programs: We outline the curriculum policy of selected state pre-K programs, and provide case studies on how different programs are approaching curriculum with FCC educators. This information may be helpful to pre-K systems leaders who are developing a plan to implement universal pre-K that encompasses a variety of settings or revising current curriculum policies for pre-K programs that are inclusive of FCCs.

Introduction: Curriculum

A preschool curriculum is the structured plan that the program has for supporting children's learning and development. It is typically inclusive of descriptions of materials, activities, and the teacher's role. There is a large body of evidence to demonstrate that an evidence-based curriculum, or one that is grounded in scientific evidence on child development and has been demonstrated through rigorous studies to support child outcomes, links to children's learning and development.¹ However, preschool programs differ in their effectiveness, and curriculum research shows variability in outcomes related to curriculum usage.² Therefore, programs have much to consider when making curriculum decisions. For example, programs must consider that professional development is crucial to optimally supporting curriculum usage; that fidelity, or using the curriculum as intended, leads to better outcomes for children,³ and that ongoing training for teachers (beyond a few brief workshops at the end of the summer or during school breaks) can support curriculum usage.⁴

Background: Curriculum in Home-Based Settings

In 2023-2024, 44 states and Washington, D.C. operated a total of 64 state-funded pre-K programs.⁵ Of those states, 24 allowed FCCs to participate in at least one of the state's pre-K programs.⁶ Although more state programs have recently allowed FCC inclusion in their pre-K programs, there is limited research on curriculum usage in home-based settings. Some of what is known about curriculum in home-based settings includes:

- Most commercially produced curricula are developed for center- and school-based settings – and these

¹e.g., Burchinal, M. (2018). Measuring Early Care and Education Quality. *Child Development Perspectives*, 12(1), 3-9; Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M., Espinosa, L. M., Gormley, Jr., W. T., Ludwig, J., & et al. (2013). *Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education*. Society for Research in Child Development.

² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM). (2024). *A new vision for high-quality preschool curriculum*. National Academies Press.

³ Wilson S. J., Morse A. B., Dickinson D. K. (2009). *Examining the effectiveness of OWL as used in ERF projects: Final report of results from the OWL Consortium Project*. Vanderbilt University Center for Evaluation Research and Methodology.

⁴ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM). (2024). *A new vision for high-quality preschool curriculum*. National Academies Press.

⁵ Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Duer, J., Weisenfeld, G., & Siegel, J. (2025). *The State of Preschool 2024: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

⁶ For more information, see Weisenfeld, G., & Harmeyer, E. (2024). *Including family child care in state-funded pre-k systems: An update*. National Institute for Early Education Research. <https://nieer.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/nieer-fcc-state-pre-k-4.11.24.pdf>

settings often look quite different from FCC settings, which typically serve small mixed-age groups.

- There are just two commercially-produced curricula designed specifically for use in FCCs: *The Creative Curriculum for Family Child Care*, and *Redleaf Family Child Care Curriculum*.
- Research shows FCC educators are less likely to use a formal curriculum than educators in public school preschools.⁷ Curriculum usage in FCCs aligns more closely with curriculum usage in the private preschool sector, with rates of locally-developed curriculum usage being similar in both program types.
- Cost may be one barrier: For instance, *The Creative Curriculum for Family Child Care* costs \$2,175, an amount that could be prohibitive without the support of states or networks. Ongoing training presents an additional, and often substantial, cost.

There are additional considerations regarding curriculum usage in FCCs to consider. For instance, materials must be suitable for mixed-ages, and relevant for use in a home-based setting. In addition, more than half of Black and Latinx families use home-based care as their primary care arrangement; ensuring that curricula are relevant for these children's cultural and linguistic strengths represents a current gap and future opportunity for curriculum developers.⁸ Finally, FCC educators often use the routines and structures of the home-based setting to enhance real-world learning opportunities, and to enable children's agency and interests.⁹ While research demonstrates the benefit of these approaches on child development, empirical evidence at scale could further strengthen our understanding of these benefits to children enrolled in pre-K in a home-based setting.

Background: Curriculum in Publicly-Funded Settings

Since 2015-2016, NIEER has assessed the degree to which preschool programs implement policies to support curriculum selection and implementation. Nearly all state-funded preschool programs in the 2022-2023 school year (92%) reported providing sites with evidence-based criteria to select a curriculum, and 72% reported that the state provides funding specifically to support implementation and/or training on curriculum implementation. Other supports include curriculum training from the state office of early learning (70% of programs) and state delivery of ongoing technical assistance on implementation (73%). In the 2022-2023 school year, 19 states required programs to select a curriculum from a pre-approved list. Of those states, six (Arkansas, Alabama, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington) allow FCCs to be included in their program.

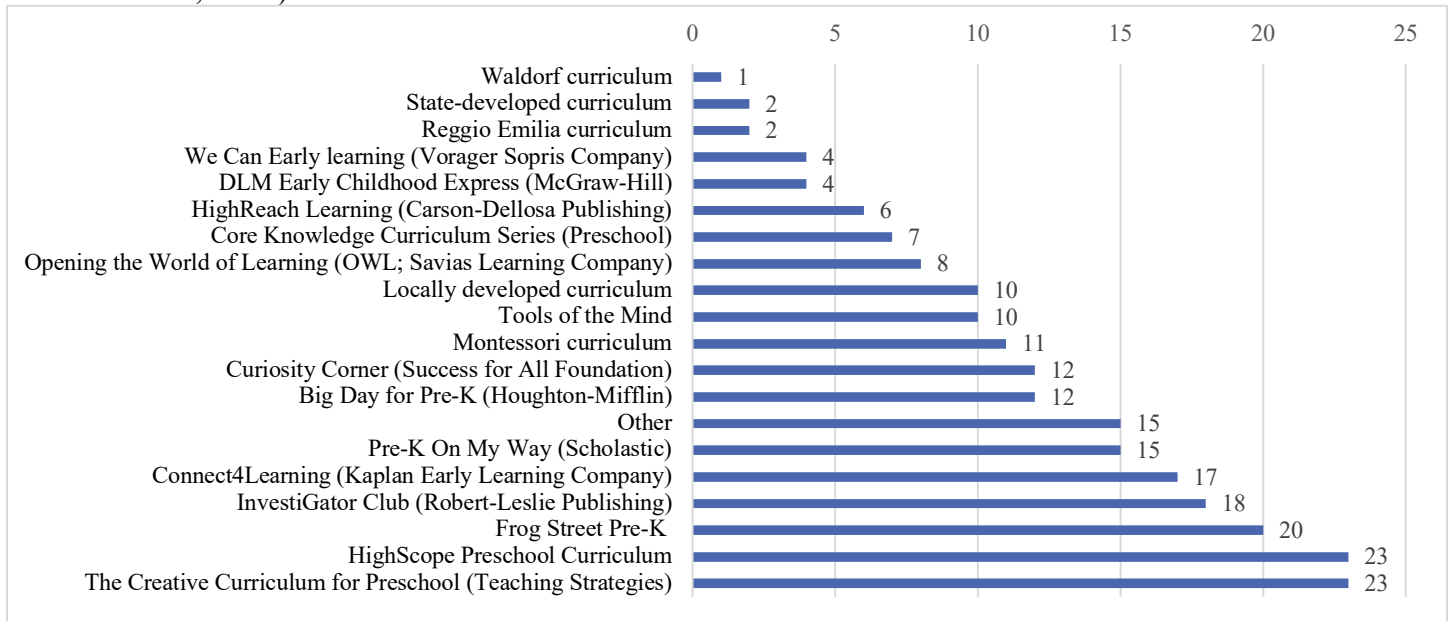
As shown in Figure 1, 29 pre-K programs had an approved comprehensive curricula list in 2022-2023. More than three-fourths of the programs had an approved curricula list that included *The Creative Curriculum* and/or *HighScope*. Importantly, *The Creative Curriculum* has a version created for home-based settings, and *HighScope* has guidance on modifications for using the curriculum in home-based programs (see Case Study 3 below). When FCC homes are included in publicly-funded pre-K programs, decision makers should consider making a curriculum that is relevant in the home-based setting available, and also bringing FCC educators to the table for feedback on how that curriculum is working (such as in Boston, example described below in Case Study 1). All six of the states that include FCCs and require providers to select a curriculum from a pre-approved list have *The Creative Curriculum* on their list (along with at least two other options). This is important because if states require programs to choose a curriculum from a pre-approved list that does not include anything that has been adapted for FCCs, FCC educators may struggle to make the curriculum relevant in their setting.

⁷ For example, a nationally representative survey conducted in 2012 indicated that 54.9% of FCC homes use a published curriculum compared with 74.1% of centers, and another study of FCC educators in one state found 55% indicated they used a published curriculum. NIEER's national survey of preschool teachers in 2010 showed that about half of teachers in the private sector did not use a commercially available curriculum – a number similar to FCC. See National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (NSECEPT). (2015). Measuring predictors of quality in early care and education settings in the National Survey of Early Care and Education (OPRE Report No. 2015-93). Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Barnett, W.S. & Jung, K. (2024, July). *Preschool curriculum use and exposure to home language and culture: National survey results*. National Institute for Early Education Research; & Phillips, B. M., & Morse, E. E. (2011). Family child care learning environments: Caregiver knowledge and practices related to early literacy and mathematics. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39(3), 213-222.

⁸ Cui, J., and Natzke, L. (2021). Early Childhood Program Participation: 2019 (NCES 2020-075REV), National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

⁹ Orland, J., Bromer, J., Del Grosso, P., Porter, T., Ragonese-Barnes, M., & Atkins-Burnett, S. (2022). *Understanding features of quality in home-based child care that are often overlooked in research and policy*. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation [OPRE] Brief #2022-76. OPRE, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Figure 1. Comprehensive curricula on state pre-K lists in 2022-2023 (for programs that report having a curriculum list; $n=29$).



Source: Friedman-Krauss, A., & Weisenfeld, G.G. (2025). [The state of preschool curricula in state-funded preschool](#). National Institute for Early Education Research.

Case Studies: Curriculum in FCCs

Case Study 1: Boston Focus on Pre-K Curriculum

Boston offers a high-quality, public pre-K program that has demonstrated some of the largest impacts on school readiness of any large preschool initiative to date, with measurable gains in vocabulary, early reading, math, and social emotional skills. A key factor in this success has been the creation of an aligned curriculum from pre-K through second grade, where each year builds on the previous. In the 2023-2024 school year, Boston Pre-K launched a pilot program with 11 FCC homes and 2 FCC coaches, beginning the development of the [Focus on Pre-K](#) tailored to FCC homes. This has included differentiating the curriculum to meet the needs of infants and toddlers alongside preschoolers. FCC coaches host curriculum development meetings where FCC educators can come together to share their experiences with implementation, provide feedback, and contribute ideas to further refine the curriculum. In addition, educators participate in professional learning communities (PLCs) that support them in strengthening best practices and continuously improving the quality of their programs.

Case Study 2: New York City's Let's Play Curriculum

New York City enrolls many children in their public preschool program, with 3,549 children served in FCC homes in the 2022-2023 school year. To support these children, the Division of Early Childhood provides FCC educators with [Let's Play! A Relationship Based Family Child Care Curriculum](#). The curriculum was developed based on the developmental expectations described in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five, and includes weekly plans that cover a 10-month school year. The weekly plans outline preparations to make for infants, toddlers and threes, and can be expanded to cover 12 months for educators who teach in the summer.

Case Study 3: Modifying and Supporting HighScope in Missouri

The Quality Child Care Initiative at Moberly Area Community College in Boone County, Missouri, is a grant-funded program aimed at improving the quality of child care in the county and promoting kindergarten readiness. As part of the program, FCC educators are supported to use the HighScope curriculum, a research-based preschool curriculum initially developed for usage in centers and schools. In this professional development program, FCC educators come together in a cohort and receive stipends for participating in weekend trainings on curriculum usage, with a focus on how this curriculum can be adapted for FCC settings. In addition, they are provided with coaching on curriculum implementation and supporting children's socioemotional development. This method demonstrates one way in which states can thoughtfully provide training on curriculum adaptations that make using a curriculum developed for center-based programs applicable in FCC settings.

Conclusion

More research is needed on the utility of curriculum usage in FCC programs. Some evidence in school- and center-based programs demonstrates that preschool curricula that are research-based and developed using evidence about how children best learn can make a meaningful difference in children's outcomes, but the unique context of home-based settings means further research on best practices should be conducted to determine what components of curriculum support educators in these settings. Although most states provide lists of curricula for programs to choose from, there is limited guidance for FCC educators on curricula developed specifically for FCCs or adapted for usage in FCCs. As more cities and states continue to include FCC programs in their mixed-delivery pre-K systems, further curricular guidance and adaptations would support FCC educators in preparing children for kindergarten and beyond. The highlighted programs give guidance on how to thoughtfully plan curriculum for FCC programs included in publicly-funded systems.

Annotated Resources

1. Harmeyer, E., Weisenfeld, G., & Frede, E. (2023). [*Including family child care \(FCC\) programs in publicly-funded pre-K: Conditions for success*](#). National Institute for Early Education Research. After reviewing the limited research base, the authors developed a set of *Conditions for Success* as a starting point for policymakers seeking to guide quality in publicly-funded pre-K programs in home-based settings.
2. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM). (2024). [*A new vision for high-quality preschool curriculum*](#). National Academies Press. This report from NASEM examines pre-K curriculum quality for children ages 3-5. The committee who developed the report issue recommendations for curriculum usage in pre-K settings with a focus on supporting children from specific subpopulations.
3. New York City Department of Education (n.d.). [*Let's Play! A relationship-based curriculum for family child care*](#). This is first month theme of the Let's Play! Curriculum (used in New York City public schools), adapted for FCC homes. The monthly plan includes a scope and sequence, weekly plans, and daily lesson plans with adaptations for supporting infants and toddlers.
4. Weisenfeld, G., & Harmeyer, E. (2024). [*Including family child care in state-funded pre-k systems: An update*](#). National Institute for Early Education Research. This report is an update to the 2021 report, [*Including Family Child Care in State and City-funded Pre-K Systems: Opportunities and Challenges*](#). In both reports, 24 states allowed FCCs to participate in their pre-K systems, however, the enrollment of children in FCC/pre-K settings has increased, but remains relatively low as compared to other settings.

Acknowledgments

In 2024, the **Enriching Public Pre-K Through Inclusion of Family Child Care (EPIC FCC) initiative** was launched. With the support of Home Grown, NIEER has been working with pre-K system leaders and FCC educators in Alabama, Nevada, Durham, NC, and Michigan as they explore developing policies and funding streams for supporting FCCs in their pre-K systems. This *Data Snapshot*, as part of the FCC & Pre-K Policy Guides series, is a result of some of the research and discussions. The authors are solely responsible for the content of this snapshot.

About NIEER

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, conducts and disseminates independent research and analysis to inform early childhood education policy.

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Appendix A

Table 1. Ten State Pre-K Programs' Curriculum Policies and Curriculum Used.

<i>State pre-K program that includes FCC</i>	<i>Curriculum policy</i>	<i>Curriculum used (if applicable)</i>	<i>Guidance on curriculum used in FCCs</i>
Arizona Quality First Scholarships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State provides guidance on criteria for selecting evidence-based curricula model(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No approved list; curriculum choice is a local decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All programs, including FCCs, make decisions locally about curriculum usage
California State Preschool Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State provides guidance on criteria for selecting evidence-based curricula model(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No approved list; curriculum choice is a local decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Childcare Home Evaluation Networks (FCCHENs) provide numerous benefits to providers, including in assisting with development and implementation of activity plans/curriculum.
Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curricula must align with ELDS State provides list of approved curricula 	State provides a list of eight approved curricula: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frog Street Pre-K (English and Dual) InvestiGator Club Pre-K on My Way The Creative Curriculum Three others not on the most common list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FCC educators are responsible for choosing a curriculum from the approved list.
Maryland Prekindergarten Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curricula must align with ELDS guidance on criteria for selecting evidence-based curricula model(s) 	Maryland does not have a state-approved list of curricula, but does recognize the following as being of historic significance and merit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HighScope Montessori Curriculum Waldorf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Maryland Family Child Care Alliance, the staffed FCC network supporting ASPIRE pre-K educators, provides FCC educators with

		Curriculum	The Creative Curriculum for Family Child Care. FCC educators who are contracting directly with the state select their own curriculum that aligns with learning standards.
Massachusetts Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● State provides guidance on criteria for selecting evidence-based curricula model(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Curriculum selection is a local decision. ● Programs must schedule and participate in EEC's Curriculum Rubric Review Training with American Research Institute (AIR). Curricula selected must be evaluated utilizing the Curriculum Rubric Foundational document. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CPPI supports FCC educators in curriculum choice with the FCC Holistic Curriculum Quality Criteria guidelines. ● FCC educators have access to the FCC Toolkit (available in five languages), which includes resources for activity planning and structuring routines.
New York State Administered Prekindergarten Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Curricula must align with ELDS ● State provides guidance on criteria for selecting evidence-based curricula model(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The 2018 Prekindergarten Curriculum Guidance memo from the Office of Instructional Support states that each local school district is responsible for selecting or developing a curriculum aligned to the NYS learning standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● While each local district makes curriculum decisions, the district with the most FCC educators (New York City) has developed an adapted version of their curriculum for FCC educators, Let's Play.

<p>Virginia Preschool Initiative</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Curricula must align with ELDS¹ ● State provides list of approved curricula ● State provides list of recommended curricula ● State provides guidance on criteria for selecting evidence-based curricula model(s) ● Programs are required to select a program from the approved/recommended list ● Requires adoption of specific curricula by all programs 	<p>State approves a list of more than 70 curricula, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Big Day for PreK ● Connect4Learning ● Core Knowledge Curriculum Series ● The Creative Curriculum ● Curiosity Corner ● Frog Street Pre-K ● HighReach Learning Curriculum ● HighScope ● InvestiGator Club ● Montessori Curriculum ● Opening the World of Learning ● PreK On My Way ● Tools of the Mind ● Locally Developed Curriculum ● Many others not on the most common list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● FCC educators are referred to available VPI resources, including the Virginia Department of Education's (VDOE) Early Childhood Curriculum webpage ● The VDOE approved curriculum list outlines three curricula that are developed specifically for FCCs: Creative Curriculum, InvestiGator Club, and Gee Whiz Curriculum for Family Child Care.
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